

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 12, 2003

The Honorable Donald Rumsfeld
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

You have made it clear that a high-tech, efficient, and mobile military must be the future of our Armed Services and is the goal of the upcoming Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission. We feel that one facility that meets these standards and deserves to survive BRAC scrutiny is the Soldier Systems Center in Natick ("Natick Labs"). If BRAC is done wisely, we believe it will conclude what many have already realized – that it is the country's most innovative soldier-centered research lab. It is a facility that serves as the prototype of a modern, nimble, lean and future-oriented military research facility in post-September 11 America.

Natick Labs is the only facility in the United States equipped to research and test the materials, technology and food that define the platform occupied by an individual soldier on the ever-changing modern battlefield. Using climate controlled chambers, altitude chambers, and a hydro-environmental simulator, the facility can simulate Afghanistan's winter or Kuwait's summer; chemical terrorism in Boston or biological warfare in Baghdad. Moreover, Natick is within 35 miles of over 80 colleges and universities. The labs have entered into partnerships with over 30 universities including Harvard, MIT, Boston University, Wellesley, Tufts, Boston College, University of Massachusetts, and Northeastern, earning recognition as the 2002 Massachusetts Outstanding School Partner. Its ability to draw from this intellectual pipeline is unmatched by any other facility in the United States.

It was Natick Labs that provided the meal that John Glenn squeezed from a tube as he circled the globe in 1962. It will be Natick Labs that provides the "smart clothing" of the soldier of the future who must circle the globe to fight terrorism. As you know, "smart clothing" can be a significant military advantage. Working with Malden Mills in Lawrence, the Labs develop technologies to interweave electronics with high-tech materials. Natick is working on a bulletproof suit could include wrist-mounted weapons fired by voice command and battery-powered T-shirts containing miniature heaters and air-conditioners. It is working to make it possible for a soldier's uniform to change colors like a chameleon. "If we are really good," says General Paul Kern of the Army Material Command, which oversees Natick, "the soldier of 2025 will be as effective as the tank of 1995."

Homeland Security will also have to be aided by an expanded mission of Natick Labs. Natick already makes sure these technological advances find application for those who are the first to respond to any emergency. "Smart clothing," can make it possible to quickly locate a firefighter trapped in a collapsing warehouse and get him out alive, or help to retrieve an injured soldier behind enemy lines.

But new responsibilities and needs of a broad array of first responders to terrorism here at home will have to be met with increased funding and capabilities of a well-supported research center. Ensuring that first responders (firefighters, policemen and women, paramedics, and emergency room doctors) have the appropriate clothing and protections against biological, chemical, and radiological attacks will be a significant benefit of the ongoing mission of Natick Labs in the coming months and years.

The daily transformation of threats to freedom and civil society makes Natick Labs the building block of a strong new defense infrastructure for the 21st century. It is efficient, partnership-oriented, and dedicated to ensuring that every American soldier is more effective, secure, and self-sufficient than the enemy. Natick Labs protects and sustains our fighting forces, as they protect and sustain our country at home and abroad.

We look forward to working with you and with the BRAC commission to review the productivity and utility of Natick Labs as you make your decisions about which facilities to preserve for the work ahead. We think you will agree that this base is vital to the ongoing technological advances in our military and the safety of our nation.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
U.S. House of Representatives



Barney Frank
U.S. House of Representatives



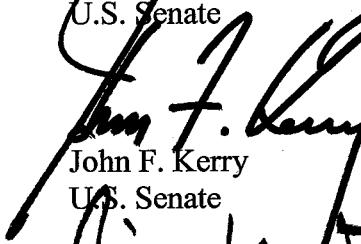
Martin T. Meehan
U.S. House of Representatives



Michael E. Capuano
U.S. House of Representatives



Edward M. Kennedy
U.S. Senate



John F. Kerry
U.S. Senate



James P. McGovern
U.S. House of Representatives



Stephen F. Lynch
U.S. House of Representatives